

VZCZCXRO2004  
PP RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHAS #0772/01 1901538  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 081538Z JUL 08  
FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6083  
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2791  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 8987  
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2424  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7279  
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6444  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1664  
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0622  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3477  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 000772

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/08/2032

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: TALES FROM THE DARK SIDE: CODEL GETS RARE MEETING  
WITH INTERIOR MINISTER

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton;  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On June 30, visiting Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) met with Interior Minister Nouredine Yazid Zerhouni, an old ally of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika who rarely meets with U.S. officials. The meeting steered clear of hot-button issues but did offer some insight into the way Zerhouni sees the world. Zerhouni painted a picture of an increasingly successful and open Algeria, though he also hinted at his dissatisfaction with the performance of local civil society organizations his ministry has financed and displayed his vehement anti-Islamist views. A man of slight build, Zerhouni is rumored to be suffering from a number of health problems, including kidney issues, although he appeared in relatively good form during a one-hour afternoon meeting held in a room without air conditioning. End Summary.

ONE MAN, ONE VOTE, ONE TIME  
-----

12. (C) Zerhouni began his tour d'horizon by recalling the urgency of Algerian government actions in the aftermath of the aborted Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) election victory in the early 1990s. The FIS and other extremists, Zerhouni said, had nothing to do with democracy, since their goal was to take power through the democratic process and then do away with that same process. Citing a phrase he said was used by former U.S. Congressman Lee Hamilton (whom Zerhouni considered "a friend"), he said the FIS philosophy was "one man, one vote, for one time." Zerhouni told McCollum of his view that "all religions" have known a violent or extremist phase, and said he felt that today's threat in Algeria came from "the same people" as the terrorist threat of the 1990s, just re-labelled with the Al-Qaeda brand name. Zerhouni boasted of Algeria's success in isolating the terrorist threat from mainstream society, something he said was drastically different from the 1990s, when Islamists drew a great deal of support from a frustrated population.

FRUSTRATION AT UNDERDEVELOPED REGIONS  
-----

13. (C) Zerhouni pointed out to Codel McCollum that the full name of his ministry is "Ministry of the Interior and Local Governance," which gave it a role not just in the security-based struggle against terrorism in Algeria but also in the human and economic development that were key to defeating the threat, particularly at the local level. Zerhouni told Rep. McCollum that his ministry had spent "as

much money on local development" as it had on security. Part of the ministry's role was to establish and finance local organizations to "develop civil society" in Algeria, he noted, implying that local groups were not performing up to their potential. (Note: As we reported in ref C, Zerhouni has made numerous well-publicized attacks on civil society organizations. While in his view he may have been referring to those under his ministry's tutelage, our civil society contacts have told us repeatedly of their perception that Zerhouni is generally hostile toward and suspicious of independent civil society organizations writ large. End note.)

#### GLOWING REPORT CARD FOR ALGERIA

-----

¶4. (C) Zerhouni summarized a list of Algeria's accomplishments since 1962 for Rep. McCollum, and took pride in the progress over which he had presided. Today, he said, of a population of 36 million, some 1.4 million Algerians attend 42 different universities. Meanwhile, 8 million students attend elementary school and 2 million are in high school. At independence in 1962, Zerhouni said that Algeria only had one university with some 3000 students. On the health front, Zerhouni pointed out that tuberculosis, polio and typhoid had all but been eliminated, while life expectancy has shot up from 46 in 1962 to 77 years today. An unmanageable 3.4 percent birth rate in 1962 now stands at 1.7 percent, according to Zerhouni. On housing, Zerhouni stated that ten years ago, there were nine Algerians per individual housing unit. Today, he said that number stood at 5.5, and

ALGIERS 00000772 002 OF 002

"housing is not a problem of quantity but rather the development and management of what is on hand."

#### CURRENT CHALLENGES

-----

¶5. (C) Zerhouni told Codel McCollum that the biggest challenge for Algeria was the need to "decentralize our system" and mentioned that Algeria had much to learn from the U.S. experience in this regard. Since 2000, Zerhouni said, he had viewed his mandate as a drive to "give credibility to the state and its institutions." He offered an assessment of the Algerian electoral system as one that "guarantees transparency and the validity of the popular vote." Capitalizing on what Zerhouni called "excellent" Algerian relations with "the FBI and CIA," he was optimistic that the fight against terror could be extended to include cooperation in the fight against organized crime.

¶6. (C) Zerhouni said his ministry has been working since 2002 on an "ambitious program" to train civil servants and local officials in management techniques, focusing on the mayors of the 1541 local districts around the country. He also mentioned a 2002 internal government decision in which the Interior Ministry agreed with the Ministry of Justice that security agents would be assessed and "graded" by judges. Claiming this empowered local officials, Zerhouni called this agreement "our silent revolution." In conclusion, Zerhouni said that the Interior Ministry was open to police training and exchanges, referring to a surge in new recruits over the past two years.

COMMENT: LORD VADER WILL SEE YOU NOW

-----

¶7. (C) Yazid Zerhouni, 71, is a longtime ally of President Bouteflika and one of relatively few ministers who have been in office since Bouteflika began his first term in 1999. He served as Algeria's ambassador to the United States in the mid-1980s (although he conducted the meeting with McCollum in French), but he is perhaps best known as the creator of Algeria's external intelligence service. He appears to see his current mandate in historical terms, consistent with the

views of many of our contacts from the same aged generation who liberated the country from French rule and have been in power ever since. Shades of that generation's belief that Algeria can "go it alone" came up several times during his discussion with Rep. McCollum, particularly when he described his belief that it was his ministry's responsibility to foster and control the development of civil society at the local level. In a similar vein, he described Algeria as a "crucible of the region" whose gradual economic opening is now arousing "the interest and greed of many."

18. (C) Zerhouni has repeatedly declined to meet with anyone from the Embassy for more than two years, but we will attempt to follow up on his assertion that Interior is open to police training and cooperation. We suspect that Rep. McCollum was granted an audience with him because of her reputation here as one of Algeria's better friends on the Hill. In any event, Zerhouni was careful to paint her a positive picture. At times during his discourse, an unsuspecting listener might reasonably have concluded that he was describing an EU-member country in eastern Europe. His characterization of Algeria's electoral system was particularly surreal. Notably lacking from his laundry list of accomplishments, however, were any claims about success in economic development. Also lacking during the meeting was air conditioning. Afterward, Codel McCollum's MFA escort apologized for the sultry afternoon heat by remarking with unexpected candor, "his health isn't good, you know."

DAUGHTON